

Connecting Caregivers to Support at Point of Care



BACKGROUND

Four million caregivers across Ontario provide an estimated 75% of care in the health and social systems, providing emotional and physical support to family members, partners, friends, and neighbours. Despite regularly navigating programs and services for the people they care for, caregivers are often unaware of the services that exist for them and that can assist them with their caregiving role. Caregivers play an essential role in the health outcomes and the quality of life for the people they care for, and while many find the role rewarding, they experience isolation, stress, and burnout which can put the health and well-being of both the caregiver and care recipient at risk.



This resource outlines suggested practices to help you identify and connect caregivers to support in your work. It also includes common challenges caregivers face in Ontario, and potential interventions as a starting point to better connect caregivers to the supports they need.

While this resource is intended for people working in health and social care organizations at point of care, it can be used as a tool for Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) to share with their organizations to enable increased caregiver support across OHT settings.



IDENTIFYING CAREGIVERS

Caregivers are often navigating the health system and looking for support for someone they are caring for. Caregivers may be facing challenges but are unsure of exactly what they need or what may be available for them. This may look or sound like a community member mentioning that they are caring for others living with an illness, disability, or other challenges, or asking for services on behalf of another person (e.g. spouse, sibling, parent, child, friend). For example, they might say:



**“I am asking
for my dad”**



**“My wife’s illness
is getting worse”**



**“My child is living
with a disability”**



**“My sister is sick
and going through
cancer treatment”**

Once you talk through their immediate needs, consider the following speaking points:



**“It sounds like you are providing care to.... We
can connect you to some support as well.”**

“What would be helpful for you right now?”

“Do you have time to focus on your own health?”

**“Did you know there are free services to support
you in your caregiving role?”**

**“Would you like to take a moment to talk
through some support options for you as well?”**

Common Situations Encountered by Caregivers and the Support Available	
Common Situations	What would help and what caregivers can expect
<p>Uncertainty about what they are looking for or what they need</p> <p>Caregivers often say that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't know exactly what they are looking for or what they need • Are unaware of the available services or the right people to contact • Want to explore all their options • Have questions about the healthcare system 	<p>Practical daily support – system navigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ontario Caregiver Helpline (1-833-416-2273) is managed by experts in community resources specifically trained to address the unique needs of family caregivers. The helpline experts guide caregivers to a wide range of resources, programs, and services tailored to their needs. The helpline is available 24/7 in both French and English, with interpretation services available in 150 languages upon request. The Ontario Caregiver Helpline is not a crisis line. • The OCO also offers live chat services Monday to Friday, from 7 AM to 9 PM, on ontariocaregiver.ca. • For information on resources, programs, and services, visit the OCO website
<p>Challenges with their mental health and well-being</p> <p>Caregivers report experiencing the following feelings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Exhaustion or burnout • Isolation and loneliness • Confusion about who to contact • Uncertainty about the steps to take 	<p>Social and Mental Health Support</p> <p>To access resources, register for programs, or receive services, caregivers (or their representatives) can click on the links provided in this document, visit the OCO website, or call the Ontario Caregiver Helpline (1-833-416-2273). A specialist will be available to guide them through the registration process and help them find available programs in their area.</p> <p>Once registered, caregivers will receive a confirmation email or a call to explain the next steps. An OCO staff member will contact them to introduce the program. If the caregiver wishes to proceed, an assessment will be conducted to officially enroll them. A letter of commitment will be sent for review, followed by an appointment with a coach. The coach will then reach out to begin one of the six sessions.</p> <p>Programs available at OCO and elsewhere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:1 Peer Support (by phone) - Register here • Virtual Support Groups - Register here • SCALE Program - Online psychoeducational support offered 2x/yr. Register here <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recorded webinars are available to watch at your convenience. • Caregiver Coaching Program - Register here • Ontario Structured Psychotherapy, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). A staff member from CAMH will contact the caregiver to confirm the information provided in the online form. If eligibility for the program is confirmed, they will schedule an appointment with a counselor for the caregiver. • Support for Families and Caregivers, Canadian Mental Health Association

Common Situations Encountered by Caregivers and the Support Available	
Common Situations	What would help and what caregivers can expect
<p>Looking for in-home support</p> <p>Caregivers often describe the following situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They cannot leave the person they care for alone at home. • They need help providing personal care to the person they care for. • They feel overwhelmed by daily tasks at home. • They notice that the person they care for is isolated. • They struggle with coordinating care. 	<p>Practical Daily Support</p> <p>Caregivers can register online or by phone, or ask a healthcare provider to submit a referral on their behalf. The organization will then contact the caregiver and/or the care recipient by phone to explain the next steps.</p> <p>Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ontario Health at Home • Adult Day Program - Ontario Health at Home • Ontario Community Support Association (Community support services, such as friendly visiting programs)
<p>Crisis or anticipated crisis</p> <p>Caregivers often describe situations where they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel overwhelmed, distressed, and unable to manage the situation • Speak of self-harm • Have to manage frequent hospitalizations, falls, or a worsening of the health condition of the person they care for • Face potential conflicts at home • Are affected by serious health issues • Experience extreme fatigue 	<p>Social and Mental Health Support – Crisis Intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distress and Crisis Ontario Services available in most areas of Ontario for individuals requiring immediate assistance, in the absence of life-threatening situations or criminal acts. In the case of imminent danger or a criminal incident, please contact 911. • Mobile Crisis Intervention Team Connect caregivers in need of assistance to the local crisis intervention team. These mobile teams offer free and confidential services 24/7, across Ontario. They provide help to individuals and families facing an active or imminent crisis due to mental health, wellness, or addiction issues. A consultation with qualified and experienced professionals can be arranged to offer tailored support, directly in the person's preferred environment. Follow-up is also provided, including referrals to other community resources.
<p>Financial Stress and Burdens</p> <p>Caregivers report experiencing stress and financial burden, expressing concerns such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to pay bills • Increasing debt • High costs of care • Food security 	<p>Future and Financial Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore Financial Supports Caregivers will need to complete benefit and tax credit applications, accessible through the provided links or phone numbers. The organization administering the benefits will communicate its decision directly to the applicant. • Find a Food Bank in Ontario Food banks are available locally throughout Ontario.



The Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) exists to improve the lives of Ontario's 4 million caregivers. OCO provides caregivers with one point of access to information, services, and supports that empower and help enable caregivers to be successful in their role. Where gaps exist in caregiver programs and services, OCO partners with caregivers, health care providers, and other organizations to find new and innovative ways to bridge those gaps so all caregivers, regardless of age, condition, or geographic location have access to the help they need.

Ontario Caregiver Helpline

1-833-416-2273

The Ontario Caregiver Organization

Email: ecpsupporthub@ontariocaregiver.ca

Phone: 416-362-CARE (2273) or 1-888-877-1626

www.ontariocaregiver.ca



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